Constructions of Hope: Three Grounds for Unity in African Urban Theory

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Abstract

African urban theory features a debate between political economists' emphasis on structural conditions and postcolonial scholars focusing on the everyday life and creative agency. Matteo Rizzo's research on *daladala* bus drivers in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, is an example of the latter approach. He critiques postcolonial scholars' emphasis on creative agency, which romanticises many difficult conditions in the global south. My paper reframes this polarising debate and proposes that these two stances can be reconciled on three grounds: a co-constitution of structural barriers and everyday life, the aim to render visible what was invisible, and contextual sensitivity. The scholars aim to render visible what was invisible and their orientation towards forms of situated knowledge. This theoretical proposition draws from a close reading of Rizzo and the postcolonial scholars' ethnographic research and Adeline Masquelier's work on homosocial male conversation groups (*fadas*), in Niamey, Niger. Therefore, this paper highlights the interconnections between various African urban theory nodes, presents them as alternatives to a dominant ideology of market fundamentalism, and points to the potential for greater unity and hope.

Keywords: Africa, Dar es Salaam, Niamey, Postcolonial, Urban theory

Introduction

> "Central to the argument that there is more to the African city than dystopia is a hopeful reading of the potential of informal economic activities."
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> (Rizzo 2017: 7)

There is an apparent rupture in African urban theory between political-economic and postcolonial approaches. This debate can be seen in Matteo Rizzo's (2017) *Taken for a Ride* book where he criticises postcolonial theorists' (Pieterse 2008; Robinson 2010; Simone 2010) emphasis of the creative agency at the scale of everyday life for being a distraction from the fundamental, structural barriers that many in the global south face. My article proposes three grounds for unity between these debates: a co-constitution of structural barriers and everyday life, to render visible what was invisible, and contextual sensitivity. Furthermore, this paper explores these three grounds in Rizzo's work on *daladala* bus drivers in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania,

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and Adeline Masquelier's (2019) research of *fadas* (i.e. conversation groups for unemployed men) in Niamey, Niger. I argue that an ambivalent and processual hope can be uncovered in the everyday life scale through these scholars' ethnographic work. In light of this argument, the debate's tension can be shifted from informal activities' potentiality to the potentiality of hopeful representation.

While everyday life is not a panacea-providing nor rose-tinted lens of the world, it is a scale and practice occurring in tandem with more extensive, structural conditions that compose mutually constitutive dynamics. The commonalities between these two sides of the debate enable greater synergetic and complementary discussions, especially against the dominant and problematic market fundamentalism consequences. This paper also calls attention to the underexplored urbanization of Niamey, a city facing immense demographic shifts and human capital deficiencies. Thus, I aim to illustrate the ordinary dynamism in and across African cities. In other words, this study cuts through the disciplinary boundaries between development studies, geography, anthropology, and urban studies, and promotes more hopeful discussions in African urban scholarship.

This article proceeds in three sections. The first summarises Rizzo's work in Dar es Salaam and his theoretical positionality against both market fundamentalism as popularised by Hernando de Soto's (2000) work and the postcolonial scholars. The second section reconciles these two polarising sides of the debate surrounding how to depict interlocutors by highlighting the mutual constitution of everyday life and structural barriers, aims to render visible what was previously invisible, and their contextual sensitivity. The third section explores these three commonalities through the case of Masquelier's work in Niamey, Niger. Redeploying Masquelier's thick description of Niamey's *fadas*, bodybuilding demonstrates the interplay of structural barriers and creative responses. The illumination of gendered labour addresses questions of visibility, and hope is also threaded through these theories by empirics, scholars, and interlocuters. This study argues that rather than emphasising noir urbanism, there is potential for a grounded hopefulness to animate cities' continuing discussions.

Critiques against Market Fundamentalism and Postcolonial Scholars

Rizzo's (2017) book investigates *daladala* bus drivers' role in Tanzanian capital Dar es Salaam through its historical, economic, and political trajectories since independence in the 1960s. He traces the shift from state provision to subsequent privatisation, liberalisation, and in-formalisation in the 1980s (pp. 27, 31). He attributes the shift to how the state rolled back its public transportation policies with the rise of neoliberalism and the World Bank's push towards a more enabling environment for private investments (p. 34). These economic conditions facilitated Dar es Salaam's severely inadequate transportation, debunking the notion that the private sector and free-market efficiencies constitute a developmental good (p. 45). Moreover, bus owners and bus drivers are segregated, where the latter have been exploited and "squeezed" through extractive practices, resulting in abysmal labour conditions (p. 72). The drivers' low marketplace power due to unskilled job seekers' oversupply also reduced their ability to negotiate for better work conditions (p. 85). To address their precarious employment, the workers eventually deployed union-based tactics to leverage associational power (p. 91). Despite the *daladala* drivers' tactics, the norms of hardship and little upward mobility remain entrenched (p. 141). These empirics, garnered through Rizzo's longitudinal study, shape the book's theoretical drive to debunk two dominant theories in urban studies against market fundamentalists and postcolonial scholars.

Market fundamentalism's problems are clear. Hernando de Soto's (2000) proposal for land formalisation rests on the ideology of market fundamentalism, claiming that the poor possess untapped assets—their land—which the state had not recognised due to excessive bureaucracy. To solve poverty, de Soto recommends land titling programs to ensure secure property rights, which would improve people's access to formal credit.[45] This is a dominant standpoint that reconciles political-economic and postcolonial urban theoretical approaches, presenting complementary alternatives to market fundamentalism's thrust for land formalisation.

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[45] There are further assumptions in his arguments that the poor would use their access to credit and magically transform into thriving entrepreneurs (de Soto 2000). The theory's support and popularity remain (Lall, Henderson & Venables 2017: 28), even though it rests upon a series of assumptions homogenising the poor and assuming their capacity to change in the wake of land reforms.

While there is little empirical evidence to support land titling's success, why are alternatives necessary? Along with numerous studies in the global south that challenge de Soto's proposals (Chimhowu & Woodhouse 2006; Haila 2007; Sjaasta & Cousins 2008; Souza 2001), Gilbert (2002: 16) states that de Soto's work is based on a "populist dream." Often, the application of land titling towards more secure property rights fails to account for the local politics of land. These politics include parallel governance institutions like twilight institutions or vernacular practices, problematising a simple and universal application of de Soto's ideas (De Boeck 2016; Earle 2014; Lund 2006). Many such studies undermine de Soto's assertion of secure property rights alleviating poverty due to entrepreneurship derived from increased credit usage.

Land titling may have enabled poverty reduction in unanticipated manners (Field 2005; Galiani & Schargrodsky 2010; Monkkonen 2012; Payne, Durand-Lasserve & Rakodi 2009), Dar es Salaam's adoption of this program has been especially detrimental for the poor. In Dar es Salaam, 219,000 formalised land rights were issued in five years during the Property and Business Formalisation Programme. Contrary to the program's original pro-poor intentions, gentrification ensued with increasing land tenure security (Rizzo 2017: 10). The mapping process in Dar es Salaam's suburbs also involves paying for land deeds and private surveying companies' services (Mercer 2019). The burden of payment increasingly marginalises the poor, who already faced debt and financial instability. Therefore, de Soto's ideas driving Dar es Salaam's land policies neglect and exploit the poor's structural barriers serving to worsen their circumstances. For these reasons, Rizzo and the postcolonial scholars (Field 2005; Galiani & Schargrodsky 2010; Monkkonen 2012; Payne, Durand-Lasserve & Rakodi 2009), push back on de Soto's universalising policies.

While both standpoints are positioned against market fundamentalism, postcolonial scholars are critiqued by Rizzo (2017: 15) for their overemphasis on creative agency exercised on the ground. For instance, Robinson (2006: 98) claims that all cities are ordinary, cutting across divisions of West/non-West, and rejects the continued acceptance of many global city hierarchies that consign many cities off the map. Another example is Simone's (2010: 120) research that aims to challenge entrenched theories by depicting usually invisible socio-spatial practices as creative interventions, challenging western normative benchmarks that might regard cities such as Kinshasa as dysfunctional. The political-

economic critique of this stance is that the emphasis on rosy depictions of survivalism in the global souths is unduly optimistic, misdirecting attention away from poverty's origins and structural economic conditions.

Three Grounds for Theoretical Unity

This debate is not zero-sum, and I propose reframing these tensions to reconcile structural conditions and everyday life that present more nuanced alternatives to the dominant view of market fundamentalism. One can define structural conditions as the economic conditions that create classes, uniting labourers by their need to secure social reproduction through precarious and insecure work (Rizzo 2017: 14). This builds on labour and industrial relations scholarship, especially Wright's (2000: 962) distinction between structural (i.e. marketplace or workplace bargaining powers) and associational power. Ultimately, structural power derives from a class position within the economic system, and the resulting associational power is then enacted from that concept. (Silver 2003; Wright 2000)

For the *daladala* drivers, the structural conception of power can be seen through three classes of labour: (1) the *daladalaman maisha* (*daladala* workers 'with a livelihood'); (2) the *day waka* ('day workers' or 'people on the bench'); and (3) the *wapiga debe* ('those who hit the tin') (Rizzo 2017: 87-89). The relative job security decreases with each labour class, where the *daladala maisha* have the most secure employment, and the *wapiga debe* have the least. *Wapiga debe* means to 'hit the tin,' and they would hit the bus's body and shout its final destination before the bus leaves (p. 89). These three classes address their precarious labour conditions by creating a transport workers' association. Those will also be implementing regulations to improve their working conditions thereby displaying associational power (p. 90). These are observed at the everyday life scale, where workers exploited their *de facto* service monopoly by charging similar fares and preserving the redundant role of the *wapiga debe* (p. 91-92). While Rizzo concedes that these associational acts are what postcolonial scholars determine as "generative" (Pieterse 2008), he states that these actions merely manage instead of challenging precarious labour conditions (Rizzo 2017: 93).

However, these associational acts are what structures turn on. Since Rizzo's understanding of structural barriers and the causal conditions of their economic

hardship are upheld upon Marxist political economy with the class as a unit, it could only exist with the *wapiga debe* as an agentive class. The *wapiga debe*'s ability to remain an agentive class demonstrates a fundamental class struggle unit's retention. This is also observed and performed through the drivers' creative and agentive everyday associational acts. Here, the mutual constitution of everyday practices and structural conditions is undeniable: one cannot exist without the other.

I present several vignettes based on the postcolonial scholars' close attention to class relations and structural conditions, albeit less overtly. Consider Simone's (2004) work on informality in Pikine, Senegal, where collaborations between women entrepreneurs emerged through the interstices of complex local urban politics. Here, Rizzo (2017: 8) decries the romanticisation of agency without attention to structural forces. Nonetheless, Simone's (2004) interlocutors are reflexively embedded in these structures. While Pikine residents claim it is "difficult to change anything" (as cited in Rizzo 2017: 6-8), this is a function of their response to macroeconomic considerations like national policies, and local political institutions such as associations and submunicipal structures (Simone 2004: 26, 56). Accordingly, residents undertake associational acts selling prepared food or other goods, and being cognisant of and responsive to structural conditions.

Additionally, Simone cites a series of neo-Marxian thinkers in claiming the "speculative destruction [that] has long constituted the underpinnings of capital accumulation through urbanization" (Brenner 2013; Harvey 1989; as cited in Simone, 2019: 23). Because of these structural forces, there is an urgent need to pay attention to on-the-ground agency and how material infrastructures are composed of emergent, improvised mosaics instead of a regular grid. Further, in Simone's edited *Urban Africa*, Jean Omasombo (2005) elaborates on Kisangani's debilitated growth, where its conditions are "inadequate for any meaningful adaptation" (p. 97). Furthermore, the disinvestment in urban infrastructure facilitates a parasitical orientation of trade (p. 110).

Toleka (i.e. bicycle taxis) riders have proliferated due to these structural conditions. For this reason, Omasombo (p. 116) notes that their agency must be reconciled with how they remain in abject poverty. Hence, structural barriers and everyday life are mutually constitutive through a dynamic constellation of socio-spatial relations. The *wapiga debe*'s preservation depicts this through acts

of associationism, Simone's attention to structural conditions affecting everyday trajectories, and Omasombo's structural disinvestment analysis impacting *toleka* riders.

The second commonality between Rizzo and the postcolonial scholars is a commitment to render visible what was previously invisible. In the literature on informality, one can trace this commitment to Keith Hart's (1973) seminal work that proposes that Accra's poor had not been passively unemployed but was instead made invisible. He contrasts formal and informal employment according to "whether or not labour is recruited on a permanent and regular basis for fixed reward" (p. 68). Rizzo (2017: 54-56) acknowledges Hart's coining of the term, though he claims that Hart commits the misplaced aggregation fallacy by conflating informal work categories that should not belong together. Rizzo tries to rectify the fallacy by several disaggregating categories within the *daladala* system: he separates bus drivers and owners and identifies three drivers based on their labour conditions. In doing so, Rizzo establishes visibility for previously aggregated groups.

Another mode of obfuscating labour exploitation is through surveys that homogenise informal labour. The Tanzanian Integrated Labour Force Survey establishes a leading dichotomy between paid work and self-employment. The former has a narrow definition of registered contract-based employees, and the latter is a catch-all term that might refer to anyone outside of agriculture (Rizzo 2017: 77-78). The survey's vague language demonstrates another instance of an aggregation of groups in official statistics that are dynamically different. By doing so, it reinscribes categories that neglect the *daladala* drivers' classes of labour and exploitation.

Both Hart and Rizzo's work are motivated by illuminating statistical modes of obfuscation. For Hart, informal labour had not been adequately captured in official statistics, and his categorisation pioneered the notion of informality. Rizzo's theorisation also attempts to establish increased heterogeneity between different labour classes, asserting the need for better official statistics to capture the differences among labourers, albeit with fluid categorical boundaries. To be sure, one can draw this similarity to Marxian notions of the commodity fetish, where congealed forms of labour-power have been hidden and alienated from its exchange-values. As Rizzo has acknowledged, the postcolonial scholars' projects aim to convey their interlocutors' dynamic agency—a clear gesture

towards illumination. As will be explained later, Robinson (2006) demonstrates this conceptual act through the urban scale with ordinary cities' notion. This way, there is a set of similarities between Hart's illuminative academic practices to Rizzo and other postcolonial scholars.

For both sides of this debate, hopefulness is embedded within their epistemological commitments towards visibility. Rizzo (2017: 174) critiques the postcolonial scholars' shallowness of hope, yet he not only builds on their scholarship but even concludes the book by outlining an approach towards "the imagination of alternatives for a better future in African cities" (p. 179). This is a hopeful reading, similar to Robinson's (2006) call for cities "understood to be diverse, creative, modern, and distinctive with the possibility to imagine their futures and distinctive forms of cityness" (p. 110). This extends a broader conversation on hope's epistemology and politics, pushing back against overtly dystopic and noir portrayals of urban settings (Amin & Thrift 2002; Pow 2015; Robinson 2010). One might recall what Coutard and Guy (2007: 731) suggest where hope could be a "middle-range theory and methodology" that breaks free from pessimism and romanticism. Thus, it is key to consider hope and alternative futures amid the exploitative practices that many in the global south endure.

The third ground for Rizzo (2017) and the postcolonial scholars' alignment would be their orientation to context-sensitive and situated knowledge production (pp. 117-120). One might critique their studies for succumbing to "new particularism" where there is little mobility beyond its specific conjuncture (Scott & Storper 2015: 12-13). However, this very attunement to context is what is empirically generative. Robinson's ordinary city is not the universal city; in fact, it evades simple dichotomies of universal-particularism through its promotion of situatedness. Robinson (2006: 109) defines the "ordinary city" as a unique assemblage of broader processes, doing away with pre-given categories and enabling cooperation across a larger epistemic community. It is an important measure that clears imperialist social theory remnants and appreciates diversity in and across cities. With a critical eye, Rizzo's project points to the dynamics of *daladala* drivers in Dar es Salaam's context, which is the basis for his ideas of grounding neoliberalism and exposes the striations of various class-mediated power contestations. These two projects align with what Donna Haraway (1988) describes as "situated knowledges," where the

translations of ethnographic representation are a form of embodied objectivity necessarily being "interpretive, critical, and partial" (p. 589). The diversity and dynamism of practices in their sites are power-sensitive representations based on a limited location and situated research. They do not assume a god's-eye perspective on either matter and are fundamentally oriented towards a partial knowledge intervention based on a rich ethnographic study with their interlocutors.

What might these projects do together? I propose that they are active contributors to theoretical generalisation, specifically in and through postcolonial urban African theorisation. This allows for the extrapolation of empirically grounded, multi-sited claims, which "can be made between a particular case and a wider population only if there is a strong theoretical or logical connection between them" (Walford 2001: 156). Indeed, Rizzo and postcolonial scholars' research enable richer theory-based extrapolation through the development of logical and grounded connections. The generative and ordinary practices of Robinson (2006) and Simone's (2010) research inform how Rizzo undertakes his analysis of the *daladala* drivers' structurally-constrained labour conditions—as agentive acts to sustain their class position.

Besides establishing stronger theoretical connections, it is a realistic proposition to consider them as co-contributors to a larger Anglophone post-colonial scholarship body. Mitchell (1983) states that "in practice any one set of data is likely to manifest only some of the elements whose explication would contribute to a cogent theoretical interpretation of the processes involved" (p. 202). Further, they complement each other insomuch as they reject imperialist social theories by advancing southern-based theorisations of the urban, especially against problematic market fundamentalism notions. Therefore, they demonstrate the importance of structural conditions and everyday life and construct hopefulness. These multiple sets of data and analyses establish a better understanding of various global south contexts, as partial yet potentially united research amid a larger constellation of postcolonial research invested in the politics of visibility and hope.

Comparative Urbanism through Niamey's *Fadas*

I turn to the emergence of *fadas* in Niamey, Niger based on Masquelier's (2019) ethnographic research to extend this discussion of common grounds, structures,

visibility, and hope. The theoretical sampling of Niamey as a case study is reliant on heuristic selection, which Eckstein (1975) defines as being selected to discern "important general problems and possible theoretical solutions" (as cited in Mitchell 1983: 186). Here, I deploy the third ground of situated knowledge and contextual sensitivity to consider how the first two grounds of the mutual constitution of everyday-ness and structural conditions, along with (in)visibility are operative in Niamey.

Following Rizzo's concern with structure, Niger faces dismal economic constraints. Niger gained independence in the 1960s and enjoyed relative economic prosperity from uranium until the 1980s before the market collapsed. Since the 1980s, multiple factors resulted in the worsening socioeconomic conditions of the country, compounded by existing problems of political instability, recurrent droughts, and chronic food insecurity. These include: (1) the global downturn of uranium prices due to the Fukushima disaster that caused Niger's deal to develop Imouraren (the largest open-pit uranium mine in Africa) with France to fall through; (2) diminished economic activity after pressure from the European Union for Niger to regulate human traffickers in Agadez, a major hub for Africans migrating to Europe; and (3) defence spending in response to Boko Haram attacks in eastern Niger that reduced financing of other projects (Masquelier 2019: 7). The promotion of private sector investment through structural adjustment programs from the 1980s exacerbated economic insecurity and urban violence, severely debilitating Niger's economy from which it has not recovered (Masquelier 2019: 20, 219). These neoliberal, free-market ideas negatively impacted Niger and its capital Niamey similar to the Tanzanian state's rollback on Dar es Salaam's public transportation. Niger also has the lowest ranking in the United Nations' Human Development Index that measures health, education, and living standards. (UNDP 2018)

Half of Niger's population is under fifteen, and the country has the world's highest population growth rate and natality rate of an average of seven children per woman (Masquelier 2019: 7). This necessitates an investigation of its youths, which demographers call a "ticking time bomb" (Masquelier 2019: 8). They embody a larger concern in urban Africa of youth facing unemployment amid socio-economic uncertainty and precarious neoliberal policies (Cole and Durham 2008; Mains 2007; Weiss 2009). With university graduates' unemployment and underemployment rates have risen across Africa (Honwana

2012: 52), educated youth struggle to find jobs and are unwilling to work in the informal market. Along the same lines, illiterate youth are not much better off in the informal market (Masquelier 2019: 2).

These conditions have significant impacts on youth subjectivities. Honwana (2012: 4) describes how youths in Mozambique, Senegal, Tunisia, and South Africa are in "waithood," a prolonged adolescence period due to unemployment. It extends the cruel optimism that Berlant (2011: 2) theorises as having begun in the 1980s regarding the unachievable fantasies of social mobility and an ideal, "good life." The structural conditions of neoliberalism that result in the *daladala* drivers' exploitation have, in this case, ultimately cast aside and denied Niamey youths regular work and wages. (Masquelier 2019: 13)

Therefore, the *fada* is produced due to these structural barriers of population growth and unemployment that subject youth to waithood, expressed as a creative socio-spatial practice of human agency. *Hira* (conversation) groups first emerged in Niamey where migrants met for informal conversations in public spaces (Youngstedt 2004). Building on *hiras*, *fadas* are more formal structures of deep sociality where unemployed youths would assemble to listen to popular music, play card games, develop new friendships, and even share career opportunities over tea (Masquelier 2019: 10). One might even argue that Niamey's economic conditions are worse than Dar es Salaam's, as the youth of Niamey engage in *fadas* due to a lack of employment, unlike the *daladala* drivers who face problems because of unemployment. Further, these spaces are poised to grow and thus warrant attention with the poor economic conditions, a demographic explosion of youth, and the lack of employment opportunities.

Political economists might claim that attention to creative agency's everyday and generative acts would be irrelevant in dire economic circumstances, but I argue that they are co-constitutive with structural conditions through bodybuilding. Bodybuilding is simultaneously an act of restoring personhood and economic negotiation, alleviating the stigma that *fadas* face in society (Masquelier 2019). Similarly, *samari* are deemed socially immature as they cannot find employment to progress to the next stage in getting married and achieving social recognition; they are unfulfilled persons (Masquelier 2019: 16). A former *fada* member captures this aptly: he was part of a *fada* in 2001 called *Adalci* that met after school, organised dances, drank

tea, but now, "we've [the *fada* members] left all this behind," due to their commitment to wives, children, and jobs (Masquelier 2019: 91). As the *samari* become 'adults,' they embody gerontocratic norms that reinforce the stigma against *samari*.

On the other hand*, fadas* provide infrastructures of solidarity against discrimination. One component of that is bodybuilding. In the wake of socioeconomic shifts threatening the *samari's* transition to adulthood, many *samari* adopt bodybuilding as a vehicle of self-fashioning (Masquelier 2019: 140). This corporeal development adds to their prestige and restores dignity (Masquelier 2019: 159). Consider Hassane's case: he dropped out of school at the age of fifteen, was too proud to take on informal work, and started a gruelling weightlifting routine at Black Warrior gym (Masquelier 2019: 147). He then transformed from a shy and slender youth into an imposing figure, earning the nickname of "L'Homme" (The Man) due to his physique, and was later hired as a security guard (Masquelier 2019: 147, 160).

The everyday acts of bodybuilding thus become an important site of responding to the structural conditions fuelling unemployment. It is deployed by Niamey youth as a "workshop—a place of training and experimentation where skills are honed, [and] selfhoods are crafted," of which bodybuilding plays a key role (Masquelier 2019: 210). Hassane's ability to get employment is crucial towards marriage, as many women in Niamey consider financial stability a precondition to getting married (Masquelier 2019: 160). For this reason, bodybuilding functions as a means to secure future employment while demonstrating that waiting time is not wasted. To reinforce these acts' connections to structural conditions, their roles as security guards connect Niger's socioeconomic shifts that have also elevated urban violence (Masquelier 2019: 138), increasing the demand for security guards' jobs.

The notion of rendering visible what was invisible is also captured in Masquelier's (2019) gendered analysis of *fadas*. The *fadas* are homosocial islands of sociality in a male, Muslim-dominated world (Masquelier 2019: 94-5). Nevertheless, Masquelier depicts how women are a crucial dimension of *fadas* through domestic acts enabling social reproduction and being part of the aspirational goal of marriage, which *fada* members covet. For instance, Masquelier's (2019: 100) scholarship claimed that the author was served macaroni or rice meal at the *fada* she visited, but the mother (or wife) who

prepared the meal did not appear to have fallen victim of gendered and moral spatial segregations. In other words, women's invisible work keeps the *fadas* going. Masquelier's rendering visible of these invisible acts resonates with how postcolonial scholars highlight previously invisible parts of the population. For instance, Hart (1973) for informal labour, Robinson (2006) for cities outside global hierarchies, Simone (2010) for cities dismissed as dysfunctional, and Rizzo (2017) for informal wage labour.

Besides these two commonalities, there is a thematic resonance of hope evidenced in *fada* identity formation and their wall paintings. The *fadas'* names matter and their names are commonly represented as wall paintings (Masquelier 2019: 78). They range from "Madara da Café" (Milk and Coffee) that lay claim to the space adjacent to the tea and coffee stand and played on the common conception of *fadas* being spaces for tea-making (p. 85). Likewise, "La Belle Vie des Jeunes Garçons" (The Good Life of Young Boys) means that the group was founded on their shared aspiration to have a good life (pp. 83-85). Some *fadas* leverage place as a way to hope, labelling their *fadas* "Texas," "Revolution," or "Ruff Ryders," demonstrating how they are "at home in the world" (pp. 86-87). Their connections to places elsewhere are fantasies that allow them to continue hoping, which are made and remade as drawings of their names on the walls of their gathering places.

However, hope is not a universal aspiration. While Rizzo, Masquelier and the *samari* share different modes of articulating hope, the *daladala* drivers are shown to have internalised hopelessness. For example, Sulemani who had driven for over 20 years mentioned that he did not have enough money for breakfast, let alone have the means to visit his family in another city; he mentioned that his circumstances were worse than a bird's because the bird knew that he (or she) would be able to eat, unlike him (Rizzo 2017: 132). His statement depicts little hope amidst the challenging conditions of driving, unable to even return home. Sulemani echoed the embodied subjectivities of the drivers who were not hopeful amid their employment. Instead of the place-driven fantasies of the *samari*, the *daladala* drivers wrote phrases like "money is torture" or "life is about suffering" on windshields (p. 73). The *samari's* stigma and lack of work gave them the time to hope, whereas the *daladala* drivers were forced to drive to eke out their living during every waking hour. Their articulations of hope greatly contrast despite various forms of suffering, but

both lend towards the researchers' empathic representational vignettes. They enable the scholars to assert forceful epistemological propositions for hopefulness: more equitable labour conditions, and ultimately, alternative urbanisms.

Conclusion

There is potential for hope—by interrogating the structural forces that Rizzo outlines and celebrating agentive tactics on-the-ground, like the postcolonial scholars. Their mutual constitution suggests that everyday acts have the potential to change and challenge structural conditions fundamentally. And they do. For the *wapiga debe*, their labour class was preserved through associational acts, living to labour another day. The *toleka* riders in Kisangani realise how their labour conditions' crushing reality stifles possible celebrations of creative agency (Omasombo 2005). However, these narratives are given a voice and rendered visible in a common scholarly aspiration towards hope.

These three commonalities—structure/everyday life, visibility, situated knowledge—illuminate *fadas* in Niamey. Therefore, the rampant unemployment produced the structural demand for the *fada* as a processual and everyday space of social solidarity. For example, Hassane's bodybuilding regime and participation in the *fada* were crucial developmental stages to attain later employment and potential marriage, responding to and challenging the imposed socioeconomic conditions.

In addition to everyday acts like bodybuilding, the *samari* also draw on aspirational places to label their groups. Walls covered in their names, like Texas or Revolution, embodies hope and a better future. Also, women constitute the invisible practices that sustain the *fadas*, operating in a highly segregated Muslim society. The depiction of their invisible, gendered work reflects similar rendering intentions, like Rizzo's (2017) analysis of Integrated Labour Force Surveys, and Robinson's (2006) ordinary cities. These united theoretical grounds coproduce a multiplicity of simultaneously dynamic nodes in a more robust theoretical scholarship body, speaking to larger discussions on informality, waithood, transportation, employment, and cityness. For instance, what practices remain invisible and why? What is the role of gender in urban mobility and labour conditions in and across cities? Or, how might the emergent youth transform the politics of waiting and employment?

Hope insists on the potential for alternative and better urban futures. To be sure, if one can take away a point from the postcolonial researchers, it is that African urbanism is a rich, fluid, and transformative field that cannot be reduced to any single debate or study. As this article's close reading has demonstrated, these two approaches open further discussion and complement each other to important effect. Their viewpoints represent multi-faceted connections between researchers, interlocutors, and audiences, enhancing forms of theorisation and challenges to market fundamentalism's damaging impacts. Ultimately, while addressing questions of ownership, class, and everyday acts, it might be apt to consider a modification on the traditional Marxist axiom to: "who owns what hope, and why?"

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